



**U.S. Department of Justice**  
Immigration and Naturalization Service

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**Statement of**  
  
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**Before the**  
  
**House Government Reform Committee**  
**Subcommittee on Criminal Justice,**  
**Drug Policy and Human Resources**

**Regarding**  
**Illegal Immigration and Drug Trafficking**  
**Along the Southwest Border**

**September 24, 1999**  
**9:30 a.m.**  
**2203 Rayburn House Office Building**

Mr. Chairman, Congresswoman Mink, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss illegal immigration and drug smuggling on the southwest border. My testimony will define the Immigration and Naturalization's (INS') role in the interdiction of drugs. I will describe the INS' strategic approach toward border management, with a focus on our enforcement strategy to counter illegal immigration and drug smuggling across the southwest land border. Additionally, the testimony will cover INS' cooperative effort with other Federal, State and local agencies. Finally, I will address technological improvements, which have significantly aided INS to carry out its mission.

The primary mission of the INS is to administer immigration law, confer benefits on qualified applicants and enforce both the criminal and civil provisions of the Immigration and Naturalization Act. Although the INS' statutory enforcement authorities do not include enforcement of drug laws, this agency has been and will continue to be an important part of our national counter-drug effort.

At ports-of-entry INS works closely with U.S. Customs on drug seizure cases; these of cases are turned over to U.S. Customs for disposition.

Between ports-of-entry the Border Patrol has the primary responsibility to intercept drugs; these cases are turned over to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) or Customs, for federal cases, or to local law enforcement agencies for non-federal level seizures.

Our enforcement goals at the border include protecting the borders against illegal entry and facilitating lawful cross-border travel. These are no small tasks. Last year, U.S. Border Patrol agents, patrolling 6,000 miles of northern and southern border, made over 1.5 million apprehensions of illegal aliens. Immigration Inspectors at land, sea, and air ports-of-entry examined over 503 million persons applying for entry into the United States.

As the INS moves toward more expedient and effective methods in screening applicants at ports-of-entry, intensifies its efforts in investigating immigration-related crimes within the United States, and preventing illegal entry between the ports, we also impact the illegal flow of drugs, in concert with other law enforcement agencies.

The Border Patrol's goal is to deter alien and contraband smuggling from crossing the border and entering the United States. For those not

deterred we interdict, and the Border Patrol continues to interdict record quantities of drugs between ports-of-entry. INS agents actively participate in Federal drug enforcement and interdiction efforts, such as the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), as well as State and local drug task forces, to identify and prosecute aliens who are involved in drug organizations.

In 1994, INS adopted a strategic approach to border management. In this approach, operations designed to achieve control of the border at the ports-of-entry are integrated with operations to deter entry between the ports-of-entry.

## BORDER MANAGEMENT

In the area of border management, INS has made significant strides to increase control of the border over the past five years. Nowhere else is the success of our strategic approach to enforcement more evident than along the Southwest border. Before 1993, there was no comprehensive unified plan for controlling this 2,000-mile frontier. The number of Border Patrol agents was insufficient to get the job done, and those we did have did not have all the equipment and technological support necessary to do the job.

As a result, illegal immigrants and drug smugglers came across the border with little fear of apprehension.

In February 1994, under the leadership of Attorney General Janet Reno and Commissioner Doris Meissner, INS embarked on an innovative, multi-year strategy to strengthen enforcement of the nation's immigration laws and to disrupt illegal entry via traditional smuggling corridors along the nation's Southwest border. Under the strategy, additional personnel, backed with equipment and infrastructure improvements, were deployed in targeted areas each year, starting with the most vulnerable areas. Agents' effectiveness is enhanced by resource-multiplying technology such as infrared scopes, night-vision goggles, underground sensors, and data processing automation, which includes a recidivist and lookout database. Enforcement infrastructure along the border is also being improved by installing fences, anti-drive through barriers and constructing all-weather roads to enhance mobile patrolling efforts.

The goal of our strategy is clear: a border that works; one that deters illegal migration, drug trafficking, and alien smuggling, while facilitating legal traffic through the ports-of-entry. Simply stated, the strategy is to

regain control of the border by focusing new resources on those areas where most of the illegal crossings occur. To meet this goal, we initiated unparalleled growth in personnel and resources. Since FY 1993, we have more than doubled the number of Border Patrol agents to over 8,000 as of the end of August, with the vast majority stationed along the Southwest border.

The strategy treats the entire 2,000-mile Southwest border as a single, seamless entity. All sectors are working under a single framework in terms of its goals, while the approach is individualized by the unique nature of each sector. Enforcement activities between the ports-of-entry are integrated with those taking place at the ports, which the strategy recognizes as both vital to the nation's economy and potential entry points for criminals and contraband. As a result, INS has been able to apprehend alien and drug smugglers across ever greater expanses of the Southwest border, while facilitating the entry for those trying to cross the border legally.

INS has achieved considerable success in restoring integrity and safety to the Southwest border by implementing the strategy through well-laid-out multi-year operations, such as Operation Gatekeeper in California

and western Arizona, Operation Safeguard in central and eastern Arizona, and Operation Rio Grande in New Mexico and Texas. The initial phases of these operations typically result in an increase in apprehensions, reflecting the deployment of more agents and enhanced technology. As the deterrent effect takes hold, the number of apprehensions decline.

### **California and Western Arizona**

Launched in October 1994, Operation Gatekeeper has proven that deterrence works. Initially, the operation focused on a critical 5 mile stretch of the nearly 2,000 miles of southern land border near Imperial Beach, California that accounted for nearly 25 percent of all illegal border crossings nationwide. Once the Border Patrol regained control of this heavily trafficked stretch, Gatekeeper was expanded to include the entire 66 miles of border under the San Diego Sector's jurisdiction. As a measure of Border Patrol control, apprehensions in FY 1998 reached an 18-year low in the sector. Apprehensions in this sector, which accounted for 45 percent of all apprehensions nationwide before Gatekeeper, dropped to 16 percent in FY 1998. So far this year, apprehensions continue to decline and the integrity of the border continues to improve in this critical stretch of border.

INS extended Gatekeeper in FY 1998 into California's Imperial Valley and Yuma County in Arizona. The expanded operation targets alien smuggling rings that moved their operations in response to the increased Border Patrol presence in San Diego.

### **Texas and New Mexico**

El Paso's Operation Hold the Line, now integrated into the more comprehensive Operation Rio Grande, began in 1993 and is now firmly established. Hold the Line, the first major operation of its kind, produced a 50 percent decline in apprehensions from FY 1993 to FY 1996. Building on that success, INS launched Operation Rio Grande in August 1997 to gain control of the border in the Rio Grande Valley and ultimately expand the coverage across all of Texas and New Mexico. Operation Rio Grande is now focused on McAllen, Texas.

Operation Rio Grande is divided into three targeted corridors. The operation began in Corridor 1, encompassing McAllen and Laredo Sectors. In FY 1998, McAllen Sector's apprehensions decreased 16% compared to FY 1997. In McAllen's Brownsville station, the target area, apprehensions decreased by 35% during that time. As of August of this year,



apprehensions in McAllen are 17% lower than in FY 1998. As the operation becomes increasingly more effective at denying access to in Corridor 1, we are enhancing our efforts in adjacent areas, ultimately leading to greater control over illegal entries across all of Texas and New Mexico.

### **Central and Eastern Arizona**

Launched in FY 1995, Operation Safeguard redirected illegal border crossings away from urban areas near the Nogales port-of-entry to comparatively open areas that the Border Patrol could more effectively control. Tucson Sector was the busiest sector on the Southwest land border in FY 1998, and that trend continued as apprehensions increased by 71,324 or 23% for the first 10 months of FY 1999. Some part of the increase in apprehensions is attributable to an improved enforcement capability made possible by adding agents, better equipment and enforcement infrastructure to the Tucson Sector. Once the 350 agents allocated in the FY 1999 budget are on-board in Tucson, 1,087 agents will have been added to the Tucson Sector since 1994.

As in other operations, the infusion of agents into Operation Safeguard has been backed by a wealth of new equipment and technology.

In addition to IDENT terminals, crucial improvements include the installation of 19 additional remote low-light surveillance cameras along the border in Nogales and Douglas, making it possible for one officer to monitor border activity at several different locations simultaneously, freeing up more agents to patrol the line. Border access roads in the greater Nogales area will be improved. Plans also include the installation of four miles of border lighting in Nogales and three miles of lighting in Douglas, expanding the existing 1.3 miles already in place.

In the areas where we have concentrated our efforts, we have demonstrated that deterrence works even in the most difficult conditions. We continue to concentrate resources on critical operational areas of the Southwest border, in support of this strategy. Once we establish control of the Southwest border, the strategy's emphasis will broaden to include the coastal and northern border sectors.

## BETWEEN THE PORTS OF ENTRY

The Border Patrol has been interdicting every kind of contraband and smuggler since its inception in 1924. The Border Patrol's strategic plan emphasizes controlling the border between the ports-of-entry through

deterrence. This year's National Drug Control Strategy, acknowledges the Border Patrol as...“the primary federal drug interdiction agency along our land border with Canada and Mexico. Strategically, the more effective the Border Patrol is at deterring illegal entry of any kind, the more effective are the counter drug strategies of the inspections agencies at the ports and investigative agencies in the interior. The Border Patrol specifically focuses on drug smuggling between the Ports-of-Entry.”<sup>1</sup>

The Border Patrol interdicts drugs mainly through two different kinds of enforcement activities: patrolling the border itself and by conducting inspections at traffic checkpoints within the United States.

Between ports-of-entry, where Border Patrol is the lead agency responsible for interdicting drugs, Border Patrol turns its drug seizure cases over to the DEA, Customs or another Federal, state, or local agency for investigation and prosecution.

On March 25, 1996, INS and DEA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which outlines the authorities, responsibilities, and

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<sup>1</sup> 1999 *National Drug Control Strategy*, p69.

general procedures for the Border Patrol to follow in its drug interdiction activities. The Border Patrol is also a participant in the INS and U.S. Customs Border Coordination Initiative. As evidenced by the cooperation and good working relationship among INS, DEA and Customs, drug investigation efforts and interdictions are on the rise.

One recent example of this cooperative effort is Operation Southwest Express. The investigation began with two years undercover work by two Special Agents in the El Paso District and culminated in a multi-state, multi-agency sting operation that so far has resulted in the arrests of ten subjects and seizure of three tons of cocaine and four tons of marijuana.

While drug seizures have remained fairly steady over the past several years, we have seen an increase this year. This year, the Border Patrol has already made more drug seizures and intercepted more drugs than ever before. Although the fiscal year has not yet ended, from October through August Border Patrol agents had already made 7,310 drug seizures, seized 1,083,348 pounds of marijuana, and seized 26,104 pounds of cocaine. Compared to the full year statistics from last year, the partial statistics from this fiscal year represent a 10 per cent increase in the number of seizures, 24

per cent increase in the pounds of marijuana, and 15 per cent increase in the pounds of cocaine.

## BORDER COORDINATION INITIATIVE

INS and U.S. Customs established a border management system to increase cooperative efforts to interdict drugs, illegal immigrants, and other contraband, while maintaining the flow of legal immigration and commerce. This initiative, known as the Border Coordination Initiative (BCI) concentrates on improving cooperation in six areas: port management, investigations, intelligence, technology, communications, and aviation and marine interdiction and resource sharing.

In 1998 key INS and Customs personnel met and joint action plans were agreed upon and implemented. The Justice and Treasury Departments continue to work closely with the Office of National Drug Control Policy and other relevant agencies to implement the plan to combat the flow of drugs, illegal aliens and other contraband.

Since its implementation the BCI has had a number of success stories. The Brownsville, Texas multi-agency Intelligence Collection Analysis Team

(ICAT) is currently doing an analysis report that links violators, vehicles, and associates with Customs cases. A local grocery store chain has begun printing on their cash register receipts the Brownsville BCI/ICAT 1-800 number to report narcotic smuggling, alien smuggling, the illegal export of firearms and currency, and other illegal activities. Intelligence gained from this effort has already resulted in apprehensions and seizures in the Brownsville area.

In Calexico, California INS, Customs, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture conduct weekly joint musters in which ICAT officers brief the rest of the staff on the latest intelligence for the port. The intent is to brief officers simultaneously on issues that may be of interest to narcotic interdictions and INS apprehensions.

Searching techniques at ports-of-entry, such as the use of stethoscopes to detect contraband concealed in the vehicle tires, were shared with the Border Patrol K-9 handlers in El Paso, Texas. As a result, a Border Patrol agent was able to seize over 150 pounds of marijuana concealed in the tires of a vehicle. Border Patrol and Customs aircraft have successfully communicated actual and suspected illegal pedestrian activities to bridge

shift supervisors in El Paso. These actions resulted in successful apprehensions and deterrence of smuggling activities.

In Nogales, Arizona Customs Canine Enforcement Officers and their K-9s have begun assisting Border Patrol Agents at the checkpoint, and responding to the scene of vehicle stops in the area. Since the initiation of this joint effort, Customs K-9s have been instrumental in locating and seizing an additional 530 pounds of marijuana.

## AUTOMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology improvements have also played a key role in the success of our enforcement functions. Our technology investments make our agents more effective in every phase of border enforcement from deterrence to apprehension to case processing. For example, the IDENT system, a fingerprint-based system, allows agents to positively identify criminal aliens and previously apprehended border crossers. This data is important in developing prosecution strategies that reinforce deterrence efforts, and in examining border-wide illegal entry trends. We are coordinating closely with FBI on ways to increase the availability of fingerprint information.

In FY 1998, INS began installing ISIS, the Integrated Surveillance Intelligence System, which links night vision cameras to centrally located command centers equipped with video monitors allowing a single agent to monitor a vast area of terrain. The ISIS system also includes ground sensors which, when triggered, send a signal to a designated camera. The video-monitoring site is alerted and can immediately view the site. This technology significantly enhances Border Patrol's ability to maximize effectiveness and agent safety. Other high tech tools include personal night vision equipment, long range infrared scopes, encrypted radios and GPS, Global Positioning System locators.

## CONCLUSION

Enforcement of immigration law is complex and resource intensive. Our enforcement goals include protecting the borders against illegal entry, including smugglers of aliens and smugglers of drugs. We have made great strides in addressing problem areas. We want to work with Congress as we continue our efforts to improve our nation's immigration system. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today. I am pleased to take any questions you may have.